DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 320 203 EA 021 789

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TITLE Preservice Administrative Mentoring: Reflections of the Mentors.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 16-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mentors; *Professional Development; *Training Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Beginning Administrators

ABSTRACT

As this monograph shows, information exists regarding mentoring's value in private business and benefits experienced by mentored school administrators. However, the literature contains few descriptions regarding benefits realized by individuals serving as mentors in programs designed to prepare educational leaders. A recent study involved the use of in-depth interviews with a group of seven practicing administrators who worked directly with aspiring administrators serving as candidates in the Danforth Foundation Program for the Preparation of School Administrators. Interviews focused on the extent that mentors' expectations were realized during the first year of program participation. Each mentor selected for intensive interviewing had been recognized by at least 5 out of 17 candidates as an administrator consulted on at least 3 occasions during the school year. Five distinct themes emerged: (1) administrative mentors derived considerable satisfaction as program participants; (2) mentors expressed positive feelings about being teachers again; (3) mentors were exposed to ideas from other school systems; (4) mentors were exposed to recent research on effective school practices; and (5) mentors viewed their role as an affirmation of their value to their local school systems. In sum, mentorship was found to be a mutually enhancing process. More research is needed on the formation of mentoring relationships and their maintenance over time. (Nine references) (MLH)

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PRESERVICE ADMINISTRATIVE MENTORING:

REFLECTIONS OF THE MENTORS

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April, 1990

EA 021 799

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PRESERVICE ADMINISTRATIVE MENTORING:

REFLECTIONS OF THE MENTORS

One of the more recent and widely-held assumptions in the field of management training in private industry (Kram, 1985; Zey, 1985) is that experienced executives are able to offer support and guidance that may serve to aid the development of beginning managers and other less-experienced colleagues. As a result, formal mentoring programs have been established in many commercial banking establishments, AT&T, the Internal Revenue Service, and many other corporations. In recent years, it has also been increasingly popular to see mentoring programs established in public education as a way to promote more effective professional development opportunities for classroom teachers (Zimpher & Rieger, 1988), and school administrators (Daresh & Playko, 1988). For example, a recent review of state education agency requirements has shown that there are presently at least 16 states that require first-year teachers to be matched with more experienced colleagues who would be designated to serve as ongoing mentors during the initial year of professional service (Bowers & Eberhart, 1988).

The concept of designating certain individuals to serve as mentors as at least one part of the formal preservice preparation of educational administrators has been a central feature of many recent emphases on the reform of leadership development programs across the nation. For example, the Danforth Foundation Program for the Preparation of School Principals was established in 1987 as a way to ensure that people moving forward with leadership careers in schools would somehow receive a type of preparation that was "different" (and presumably better) than others who had participated in more traditional educational administration degree and certification programs of the past. While the exact nature of programs at the different participating university sites varied, there were a number of assumptions and practices that were embraced at all institutions hosting Danforth programs. For example, it was accepted that the programs designed in each case would emphasize learning through experience rather than simply through the conventional approach, namely the accumulation of graduate credits from traditional university courses. Second, all local adaptations of the Foundation agenda were expected to make certain that positive and collaborative relationships were formed with local school systems as the foundation of any university-based reform effort.

A third common ingredient in all programs has been the designation of individual experienced school administrators to serve as ongoing mentors to the candidates selected for participation in each of the local Danforth programs. It has been widely believed that relationships formed between aspiring educational leaders and their mentors would serve as a central, driving activity leading to more effective leadership preparation. In this paper, we examine this belief more completely, not from the perspective of whether or not the aspiring administrators were assisted by the mentors. Rather, our focus here is to look at the apparent effect that serving as a mentor had upon the mentors themselves. We begin by briefly reviewing some of the major assumptions included in most descriptions of the concept of mentorship. Next, we describe more completely the nature of our recent study that was related to the types of benefits that were perceived by the mentors who participated in one Danforth Foundation Program. We conclude by considering some of the most significant implications for improved practice that may be derived from the findings of this study.

Mentoring for Administrators

Proposals suggesting approaches to the improvement of the ways in which educational personnel might be prepared for their work have

quite recently offered suggestions for practice that parallel the three major ingredients of the Danforth Foundation programs that we noted earlier. Field-based learning opportunities, increased collaboration between universities and local school systems, and the use of mentors to guide professional development have all been suggested as ways in which newcomers to the field of educational leadership might be brought "on board" more effectively. By and large, the literature in this area has been focused on issues associated with the preservice preparation and, more recently, the induction of classroom teachers. At present, research-based and theory-driven descriptions of the ways in which people assume roles of formal leadership are relatively rare. This has led to either a general paucity of material that is associated with leadership preparation issues, or efforts to apply the knowledge base that has been acquired through analyses of teacher education directly to the world of school administration.

With regard to the former issue--the general lack of research related to administrator preparation--we believe that things are beginning to change. While a review of the research conducted during the last 25 years would yield a woefully inadequate analysis of how people become administrators (Greenfield, 1985), the more recent past has witnessed some developments that may indeed cause this situation

to be different. Work such as the review of preparation programs carried out by the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988) and the National Policy Board on the Preparation of Educational Administrators (1988) have served to intensify scholarly interest related to how people become school leaders. Indeed, the presence of a nationwide effort such as the Danforth Foundation Program for the Preparation of School Principals is also likely to encourage researchers to cast more serious glances at the field of administration as a focus for inquiry.

The second trend--relying on teacher education too define the field of administrator preparation--is considerably more problematic. There are clearly some conceptual overlaps between the domains of teacher preparation and administrator preparation. But we also believe that there are a number of limitations on trying to transfer the use of practices directly from one field to the other. This is particularly true of the potential values of mentoring programs for school teachers, as contrasted with efforts that are targeted for school administrators. In a recent analysis of some of the major differences between teacher mentoring and administrator mentoring (Daresh & Playko, 1989a), we noted the following:

1. The knowledge base on teaching behaviors as they are related to effective practice (defined more often than not as increased student achievement), while certainly not perfect

and completely developed, is considerably more advanced at this time than it is for administrative behaviors. As a result, there are more clearly-defined guidelines that may be used by teacher mentors as a strategy to guide the development of their proteges.

2. There are norms which exist to make it more difficult for practicing administrators to admit their need to obtain assistance and help through mentoring programs. It is often harder for administrators to admit a lack of "knowing everything" than it might be for most classroom teachers. After all, there is a prevailing view that people are hired for leadership roles precisely because they provide answers, not because they ask questions. Principals and superintendents often resist asking someone like a mentor to provide assistance because it is a time-honored tradition to suggest that when an administrator seeks help, it is a sign of professional weakness or even incompetence.

3. New administrators are not new to schools, at least in the ways in which beginning teachers are new. Consequently, the focus of mentorship as a way to introduce people to the basic routines and practices associated with the daily life of schools is not a high priority in mentoring programs designed for administrators.

4. An assumption of mentoring programs for teachers is that teachers are able to engage in a variety of daily informal contacts with their peers. These contacts serve as natural openings in which mentoring relationships might be developed and promoted. The same type of professional proximity leading to spontaneous contact is not true of administrators who might not see their administrative colleagues for several days at a time.

Despite these limitations, there are clearly certain benefits to be found in the use of mentoring in virtually any field, whether it is classroom teaching or in school administration. Mentorship has at least two potential applications as a way to improve the ways in which professional development (at the preservice, induction, or

inservice levels) is provided to school leaders. The first of these is related to the identification of individuals who would serve as appropriate role models for other administrators. Frequently, the term "mentor" is assigned to the experienced administrator who happens to be available to answer the questions posed by colleagues. We recognize that it would be desirable for individuals such as these to become true mentors to the administrators with whom they happen to work, and such relationships may often evolve. However, we suggest that being a sponsor, patron, or role model is by no means the same thing as being a true mentor in the ways in which we believe administrators need as part of their ongoing professional development. To be sure, we believe that it is crucial for someone to work with administrators to describe procedures, policies, and normal practices in a school or district. It is also critical that someone be able to provide feedback to colleagues regarding the extent to which they successfully perform the technical skills associated with carrying out an administrative role.

A second potential value of the concept of mentoring as part of a program for the professional development of school administrators is found in its application as part of a process that we refer to as "Professional Formation" (Daresh, 1988). This is part of what we believe must be three equal parts of professional development. Other dimensions are "Academic Preparation" (where the theory of

administration is presented), and "Field-Based Learning" (the acquisition of technical skills while actually being in the "hot seat"). Mentoring is an absolutely essential part of the Professional Formation dimension. It is at this point in the preparation process where individuals are able to clarify their personal "visions" of what educational leadership means, and also to develop a sense of commitment to a career in the field of administration. The type of personalized coaching and feedback that is part of an effective mentoring relationship serves as the foundation for giving direction to Professional Formation.

A review of existing literature provides some additional insights into the values normally associated with formal mentoring programs. Gray (1983) and Clutterbuck (1985) looked at peer coaching activities in a variety of private corporations and identified three major sets of benefits to be derived by individuals who serve as mentors. These include improved job satisfaction, increased peer recognition, and potential career advancement.

Perhaps the greatest number of rewards for mentors have been traditionally found in the area of improved job satisfaction. Here, mentors in private corporations have reported that grooming a promising new executive is a challenging and stimulating personal experience, particularly if the mentor has reached a point in his or

her own career where a lot of the earlier "excitement" is disappearing.

Mentors also indicated that their experiences were "worth it" because they enjoyed increased recognition from their peers. In private businesses, in particular, a mentor who identifies promising new employees often acquires a reputation for having the type of insights into the needs of the company that should be rewarded.

Finally, mentors have also indicated that they found satisfaction in their role because it often provided them with opportunities for personal career advancement. In this regard, a major pay-off has been described as the fact that mentors often benefit from the energy and enthusiasm of those who are their proteges. Mentors who have been attentive to the potential of those with whom they interact have been able to capitalize on a new source of knowledge, insight, and talent, and this may have been translated into personalized forms of growth and professional development.

Benefits also accrue to proteges. Among those most often cited by those who have served as proteges in structured mentoring programs for administrator professional development are the following:

1. Working with a mentor is a way to build confidence and competence. Proteges enjoy working with people who sense that they possess skills needed to meet new professional challenges. They are able to receive the type of "tapping," encouragement, and reinforcement from their mentors that enable them to look to their future responsibilities with a good deal more confidence.

2. The mentoring experience provides people with the opportunity to blend the theory of administration learned through university courses with real-life applications out in the field. People can see ideas being translated into action on a daily basis in real school settings by real school practitioners.

3. Communication skills are frequently improved. Working on a regular basis with mentors gives people the ability to fine-tune their abilities and to express important ideas to their colleagues.

4. Proteges report that they are able to learn many important "tricks of the trade." They are often able to pick up a number of proven techniques and strategies that mentors have used successfully in different settings. As a consequence, they are able to build personalized "bags of tricks" to use on the job at different times in the future.

5. Perhaps most importantly, proteges express a feeling that they are now "connected" with at least one other person who understands the nature of the world in which they must work. There is little doubt that one of the most frustrating parts of the school administrator's life is that he or she must often go about the business of leading while in isolation. A mentoring relationship reduces this type of situation greatly.

In short, there is information regarding the value of mentoring in private business, and also some research related to the benefits often derived by those who have been mentored, particularly in the pursuit of careers in school administration. What has been absent from the literature are descriptions related to the benefits that have been realized by individuals who have served as mentors in programs designed to prepare educational leaders.

Study Methods

Our study involved the use of in-depth interviews with a group of practicing administrators who worked directly with aspiring administrators who served as candidates in a Cycle I program of the Danforth Foundation Program for the Preparation of School Principals. The mentors had been provided with some specialized training prior to beginning their work. The question posed during the interviews focused on the extent to which the expectations of the mentors that were present prior to the start of the program were realized during the first year.

Data for the study were derived from responses obtained during interviews with seven practicing administrators who were identified by Danforth candidates (aspiring administrators) as the most frequently-consulted during the course of the first year of the program. Each mentor selected for intensive interviewing had been recognized by at least five (out of 17 candidates who were participating in the first year program) as an administrator consulted on at least three occasions during the school year. This was selected as a criterion for mentoring effectiveness because no minimal or maximum number of contacts between mentors and candidates were prescribed as part of the program. Rather, candidates were free to select and make contact with a pool of administrative mentors.

Consequently, anyone consulted on a number of occasions by a large percentage of the candidates could be classified ass someone who was perceived as particularly helpful, or "effective." The number of contacts between candidates and mentors was seen as a reasonable measure of successful mentoring.

Findings

The findings from this study regarding the perceived benefits to be derived by practicing mentor administrators as a consequence of their participation in an administrator mentoring program paralleled the results of similar studies of individuals who worked with proteges in non-educational settings. Specifically, we discovered five distinct themes that appeared through this work.

1. Administrative mentors reported considerable satisfaction derived from their participation in the program.

As further confirmation of this view that appeared to be held by all participants, each person who was interviewed specified that he or she would willingly serve as a mentor again in a similar program, with or without any form of compensation. Working with the candidates had been a personally rewarding experience that people wanted to duplicate in the future. This belief was voiced by each of

the respondents, one of whom made the following comment,

> It was nice to receive a few tokens and plaques to note that we served in the program, and I appreciated the dinners and so forth, but just working with the candidates that I saw was more than enough of a reward.

2. **One of the most satisfying aspects of working as a mentor was the ability to "be a teacher again."**

A persistent frustration among many school administrators is that a seemingly automatic trade-off associated with their move out of the classroom is the fact that they are no longer able to work directly with students, at least not in the same positive ways in which they used to work as teachers. Being designated as a mentor to work with a group of administrative candidates was a way for people to be able to work with "students" once again. They expressed a sense of personal and professional fulfillment that came about by being able to watch learning and professional development take place around them. As one of the mentors noted,

> I really enjoyed working with the candidates who came out to visit me. It was fun to have a chance to visit with some enthusiastic beginners...some people who were really eager to learn. The questions that they asked me really caused me to step back and think about what I was doing.

3. **Contact with candidates exposed mentors to ideas from a number of other school systems.**

Mentors reported that working with aspiring candidates from a variety of neighboring local school systems enabled them to have

contact with ideas and practices that were taking place in other school districts. More often than not, such opportunities for hearing about good practices in other settings were not available to practicing administrators who were confined to their buildings or school districts by their ongoing responsibilities. One principal who had been serving as one of the mentors supported this apparent benefit of participation in the program by noting, "They [the candidates] were like 'eyes and ears' around the schools of the county."

4. Mentors learned about recent research on effective school practices as a result of their contact with candidates.

Because the Danforth candidates were also enrolled in traditional graduate university courses at the same time that they worked with their program mentors, they were often able to bring the findings of recent educational research to their mentors out in the field. A considerable amount of sharing and discussion related to the things that the candidates had learned at the university often served as central features of dialogue and contact between the mentors and visiting candidates. This enabled many practicing administrators to be exposed to material and ideas that would not typically be available to them during the course of their normal duties. Two of the mentors specifically remarked that one of the best features of the Danforth program was that they had access to a

type of ongoing "inservice" that was provided by the candidates when they came out to the field "loaded with a whole bunch of fresh ideas."

5. Administrators designated as Danforth mentors viewed that role as an affirmation of their value to their local school systems.

One important observation that was made by each of the mentors interviewed was that serving in their roles made them feel good about their own value to local school districts which had nominated them for participation in the program in the first place. One mentor summarized her feelings about this,

> I know that I am a good principal. And yet, I don't hear that very often--or maybe never--from the superintendent or the central office or the school board...at least, not directly. But when I was put into this Danforth program by [the superintendent], I really felt good, like I was being recognized as somebody who was really doing a good job and making some difference.

In short, serving as a mentor was considered to be an implicit endorsement of the effective performance and professional competence of the participating administrators.

Discussion

Mentoring programs for aspiring and beginning school

administrators are likely to become increasingly approaches to professional development as they are seen as important strategies that may be used to bring new people "on board" as effective educational leaders (Daresh & Playko, 1989b). In this respect, professional education is apparently engaging in the same type of activities often described as effective part of management development in private industries during the past several years (Kram, 1985). As a result, the implementation of mentoring programs as activities that have been common to all Danforth principal preparation programs across the United States, and other similar efforts to improve the ways in which individuals are made ready to assume educational leadership roles, is understandable. There is a presumed value in mentoring as a strategy to be used to help aspiring school administrators to learn their craft more completely.

The findings of our study suggest two additional observations concerning the implementation of preservice administrator mentoring. First, the effects of such activities are clearly felt not only by those being mentored, but perhaps more importantly, by those who also serve as the mentors. This fact needs to be recognized as mentoring programs are being planned and implemented with greater frequency across the nation. There is often a concern that proper incentives need to be identified as a way to encourage individuals to serve as mentor administrators. The assumption in many cases has typically

been that some type of additional financial reward is always necessary to encourage people to engage in helping behaviors. Our findings do not reject the need to consider such approaches. However, we also suspect that the fact that simply serving as a mentor may often be its own reward, and that fact is often ignored or forgotten.

The second issue that emerges from this study is that the practice of encouraging experienced school administrators to serve as mentors to either aspiring or beginning colleagues may be a powerful approach to inservice education for practitioners. Our study strongly suggests that individuals who had contact with talented newcomers learned as much as they taught. A real implication that may be derived from this observation could be that mentoring programs might not be confined solely to activities designed for preservice or induction programs. Instead, there may be considerable value attached to the development of ongoing mentorship for experienced administrators as well.

Summary

In this paper, we presented a brief description of a recent study related to the ways in which a group of practicing school

administrators perceived their involvement as mentors in an innovative, experiential principal preservice preparation program that was supported by the Danforth Foundation. It was believed that the involvement of experienced practitioners in such a program was critical because it would be beneficial to aspiring administrators. While this appeared to be true, we also discovered that mentoring also has a parallel set of benefits to both mentors and proteges. We learned that mentorship is truly a "mutually-enhancing" process (Kram, 1985). Further, we learned more about the precise nature of the benefits that were achieved by the mentors.

More research is needed to identify more completely the ways in which effective mentoring relationships are initially formed, as well as how they are maintained over time. What we have started with the work presented here is a clarification of the ways in which there is considerable potential for professional growth and development to be achieved through the application often incorrectly described as a one-way process. Mentoring for administrators is clearly something that benefits all involved parties. It is more than a passing fad.

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